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CANADA, SASKATCHEWAN AND FIRST NATIONS IN SASKATCHEWAN SIGN HISTORIC CHILD WELFARE FRAMEWORK

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REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN (JULY 22, 2008) – The Honourable Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, together with the Honourable Donna Harpauer, Saskatchewan Minister of Social Services and Vice Chief Guy Lonechild, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations today announced an historic framework for First Nations child and family services in Saskatchewan.

"The agreement we are signing today is an example of our government's commitment to work with stakeholders to build healthier, stronger First Nations communities," said Minister Strahl. "This new approach will help to ensure First Nations families in Saskatchewan receive the support and services they need before they reach crisis."

The Government of Canada has invested $104.8 million in new funding to the Saskatchewan child and family services framework over five years. This investment provides First Nations agencies with new resources that identify a family's need before a child is removed from the family home.

"Together with our federal and First Nations partners, we share a commitment to ensuring Saskatchewan children grow up happy and healthy in a safe, nurturing environment," said Minister Harpauer. "This investment will allow us to support families at-risk by providing services and tools to help them to care for their children."

"Now with the announcement of prevention funding the First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies can start to work towards a truly positive change," said Vice Chief Lonechild. "And will finally be able to look at other answers beside apprehension services to support children and families."

This framework with the province and First Nations in Saskatchewan is an effective model for other provinces and First Nations agencies that may wish to discuss similar arrangements for an enhanced prevention-focused approach.

It shares the vision of the Alberta Response Mode. The tripartite agreement signed in Alberta last year ensures First Nations families receive appropriate child and family services in a timely manner.

Backgrounder - First Nations Child and Family Services (National)

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Backgrounder - First Nations Child and Family Services (National)

Today, First Nations children are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population. Historically there has been no federal child welfare legislation. As a result, the Government of Canada, through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), formed agreements with many provincial governments to deliver child welfare services on-reserve. INAC would then reimburse the provinces for services which were provided.

The goal of INAC's First Nations Child and Family Services (CFS) program is to support First Nations communities in providing culturally sensitive child welfare services comparable to those available to other provincial residents in similar circumstances. The First Nations CFS program is one of many INAC programs and services dedicated to individual and family well-being.

Since the creation of this program, there has been a significant increase in the number of First Nations CFS agencies from 34 in 1989 to 108 in 2007. In 2006-07, INAC funded 108 First Nations child and family service agencies across the country. INAC provided $450 million in funding to support 8,262 children in care (in foster homes, group homes and institutions.) In Budget 2008, the federal government committed $43 million over two years for prevention-based models of CFS on reserve.

First Nations CFS – Enhanced Prevention-Focused Approach in Saskatchewan

The Province of Saskatchewan used community-based organizations for prevention services. It has found value in restructuring the provincial CFS program model to include enhanced prevention services. The framework endorsed by First Nations, INAC and Saskatchewan outlines a broad set of provincially comparable goals and objectives.

The enhanced prevention approach will support:

- Families getting the support and services they need before they reach a crisis;
- Community-based services and the child welfare system working together so families receive more appropriate services in a timely manner;
- First Nations children in care benefiting from permanent homes (placements) sooner -- such as helping families to plan alternative care options; and
- Services and supports coordinated in a way that best helps the family.

Child Welfare Service Delivery in Saskatchewan

There are 70 First Nations communities in Saskatchewan served by the 17 First Nations CFS agencies. On March 31, 2007 there were 1,159 Saskatchewan First Nations children in care.